

Minutes Student Life Committee
meeting 10/25/2010, 3-4:00 pm in Trimble Hall

Guest speaker: Shane Daetwiler

Attending faculty members: Bruce Mann, chair; Lisa Ferrari, Associate Dean; Peggy Burge, library liaison; Nila Wiese; Geoff Proehl; Bill Dasher; Aislinn Melchior.

Attending student members: Alyssa Raymond; Peter Bittner; Cameron Ford; Stephanie Wood.

The meeting was called to order at 3:04 by the chair and the minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Shane Daetwiler, Director of Residence Life, came and spoke to the committee. The chief aim of his talk was to help the committee examine further the possibility of constructing a new residence hall with an eye to the needs and desires of both the potential student residents and the overall contribution to campus life.

Shane spoke about the changes in residence life since he was hired in the mid-nineties and the direction that the university is taking as it pursues the goal of becoming a largely residential liberal arts college. In the 1990s, there was no professional staff in the residence halls and no regular oversight of the students who were working with the residents. For the past eight years we have shifted towards a system with four full-time live-in resident directors. Each resident director is responsible for 3 buildings, roughly 18 staff, staff training, and they also serve as hearing officers for conduct system. This is a definite improvement upon the earlier system and has made the university more proactive in addressing student concerns and problems.

Occupancy rates and our current housing requirements:

The university currently has 1623 bed spaces with about 93-96 percent use (60-100 bed spaces open). 96 percent of first-years choose to live on campus. (This compares to 70% of sophomores.) In the spring semester, there is a drop in occupancy rates, in part because a large number of students generally study abroad. In the spring, there can be a loss of up to 90 or so residential students. (This means that the housing rate falls to 88-90 percent occupancy.) Such a drop is in part caused by the fact that those who live on campus are not tied to a 12 month contract as off-campus students often are. Thus students who expect to study abroad will often opt for on-campus housing for the year they plan to spend a semester away. Greek houses are contractually obligated to maintain 90 percent occupancy average over the year.

Housing patterns:

Just as there is a drop from Freshman to Sophomore year in terms of campus residence, the numbers of resident students continues to diminish as students move towards graduation. There was general agreement that traditional dormitory housing was beneficial for the freshmen because it encouraged interaction with a large number of other students and fostered friendships. The most desirable residences as students solidify their groups of friends, however, are the houses owned by the university. Often

when upper classmen are unable to acquire a house through the housing lottery, they opt to get a house together off campus. The houses, while most attractive to the students, are the most expensive for the university to maintain.

Residency requirement:

One idea being entertained is that of a residency requirement for freshmen and sophomore students. Currently there is no requirement, but it is hoped that a requirement would contribute to retention rates, cohort cohesion, and the intellectual climate on campus. If such a requirement was instituted, waivers would be available for students who had a valid reason to opt out of on-campus housing, but looking at the numbers, we would like be short 100-150 beds for upper classmen who desired to stay on campus. To institute such a policy would therefore require the construction of additional housing, in that it is beneficial for the lower classmen to have contact with upperclassmen who provide both institutional knowledge and can serve as intellectual role models. A decision to institute such a requirement would be made by the board of trustees.

Needs/desires in any new construction:

Any new residence hall would have to pay its own way and not add to the debt load of the university. Another thing that is being evaluated is the significant number of infrastructure requirements that will accompany the increased number of students on campus. It was suggested that this might also lead to a greater number of policy violations, in that with 40 percent of the student body off campus, as opposed to the projected 20 percent, there would be less opportunity to leave campus to break rules.

The main goal in moving towards a more residential campus is to improve the links between classroom learning and student life – not to put them in the same space, but to increase the contact between the two worlds. As a possible design for a new dormitory is contemplated, the goal is for a mixed used space that would provide the most desirable types of housing (based upon a suite or apartment model) with academic spaces and perhaps a covered patio for year-round use on less than sunny days. There has been less push and interest in the latest technology, more interest in increasing the number of common spaces, as well as more private reading spaces. The building could also potentially be used to house all levels of students so that there would be interaction and learning between the classes.

The discussions of the desired features of a new dormitory and the various issues related to building it are at a fairly early stage but are ongoing.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:57.
Minutes submitted by Aislinn Melchior.